

# Talking to Learn

## Definition

Talking to Learn creates the space for students to articulate their thinking and strengthen their voice. It can take place in pairs, in collaborative group work and as a whole class. As students become accustomed to talking in class, the teacher serves as a facilitator to engage students in higher levels of discourse. Classroom talk opens the space for questioning, effective scaffolding and successful collaborative group work and literacy groups.

## Advantages

- Actively engages all students
- Supports sharing information and knowledge with one another
- Promotes and practices both speaking and listening skills
- Helps speakers articulate their ideas and develop voice
- Assists with question generation
- Promotes group work and collaboration
- Requires active facilitation and listening skills

## Actually, it ...

- Develops reasoning skills, social skills, and self-confidence
- Helps students learn more effectively by talking about content
- Helps students acquire a vocabulary that supports content acquisition
- Builds relationships among students and teachers

## Phrases to Extend Classroom Talk

1. Encourage students to make their own meaning by using phrases such as *I wonder... maybe... perhaps... how could we check?*
2. Encourage students to see multiple perspectives by using phrases such as: *Are there other ways to think about this?* and *Are there any other opinions?*
3. Promote symmetrical power relationships among teacher and students by using phrases such as *Can we look it up in a book?* and *Is that fair?*
4. Encourage the students to build ideas together through conversation by using phrases such as *We can build that idea bigger* and *I notice Laura jogged your mind with her comment.*

## Getting Started...

Confine conversation to the assigned task

- Start by paring students
- Use low-stakes writing activities to help generate discussion
- Arrange classroom seating to maximize discourse
- Ask for clarification
- Respect the speaker's point of view
- Practice developing wait time before contributing to conversation and help students to also do this
- Summarize key points of the conversation before the lesson ends

## Examples of Classroom Talk Activities

1. Webcharts
2. Poll Everywhere
3. Think Pair Share
4. Discussion Boards
5. Live Chats
6. Use video to talk out and explain topics
7. Popplet – by Notion (*concept mapping*) works with iPads and iPhones.
8. CLEAR from MSU
9. Coveritlive – Multimedia Discussion
10. Skype, Facetime, etc.
11. VoiceThread

## Sample Times to Use Classroom Talk

- To assess prior knowledge
- To predict
- To assess understanding at the mid-point of lesson
- To process new knowledge
- To restate new knowledge
- To help others understand concept
- To design/create something new
- To review

## Helping Students Have Something To Say

- Have students write, either in or outside of class, to generate ideas for discussion. Give them a specific question or problem to address.
- Have each student come to class with a written question related to the day's discussion topic.
- Give students a brief questionnaire as a basis for starting discussion.
- Use small group discussion to encourage all students to make a commitment about the discussion topic. Bring the class back together to synthesize various groups' reactions. Groups can all discuss the same question, or each group can be assigned a specific part of a problem or task.
- Taking sides: Two sides may emerge out of discussion, or the teacher can pose them at beginning. This may be done physically by calling for a "division of the house" (*students must physically change sides if changing their minds*). *Note:* only use "division of the house" if you are confident there will be a good showing on both sides—otherwise students taking the unpopular side will feel conspicuous and isolated.
- Brainstorming: Initiate discussion by asking students to uncritically generate ideas, which are written on the board/overhead. The discussion can then proceed to organize, synthesize, or evaluate the ideas generated.

## Encouraging Students to Feel Comfortable Participating

- Provide opportunities for students to get to know one another.
- Have an "icebreaker" activity early in the quarter.
- If discussion will be a significant activity of the class, start the quarter with something everyone will want to discuss (*e.g., something popular or controversial*) to get students used to participating.
- Provide a written set of ground rules for discussion (*or have the class generate these rules as a group*).
- Control discussion monopolizers to give everyone a chance to participate.
- Reward participation with both verbal and non-verbal cues (*"Thank you."* *"That's a good point."* *"Would anyone else care to comment?"* *Nodding and maintaining eye contact.*)
- Make connections between students' comments to encourage dialogue.
- Call on nonparticipants. (*This will be less threatening if they have had an opportunity to prepare ahead of time through a writing task*).
- Be tactful in correcting misinformation or wrong answers.
- Remember that quieter students may feel safer contributing in a small group discussion.
- Summarize student input on the board, when appropriate, to make it clear that the ideas students generate are an important part of their learning.